

MOTION BY SUPERVISOR YVONNE BRATHWAITE BURKE

May 18, 2004

The law in the United States sanctioned racial segregation in public schools until 1954. Although all the schools in a given district were supposed to be equal, most schools for African American students were far inferior to those for white students.

In the fall of 1950 members of the Topeka, Kansas, chapter of the NAACP agreed to again challenge the "separate but equal" doctrine governing public education. This followed two years of unsuccessful action the chapter had undertaken to persuade school officials to integrate their schools.

Oliver Brown had asked the NAACP for help after an unsuccessful attempt to enroll his daughter, Linda, a third-grader, in the white elementary school, which was only seven blocks away. He was concerned that the one-mile walk she had to make through a railroad switchyard to get to her black elementary school was unsafe. The Topeka NAACP agreed to assist the Browns. Other black parents joined the action, and in 1951 the NAACP requested an injunction that would forbid the segregation of Topeka's public schools.

The U.S. District Court for the District of Kansas heard Brown's case from June 25-26, 1951. Although the judges agreed that "segregation of white and colored children has a detrimental effect upon the colored children," they wrote that they felt "compelled" to rule in favor of the Board of Education, because the precedent of *Plessy v. Ferguson*, allowing for separate but equal school systems for blacks and whites, had not been overturned by the Supreme Court.

Brown and the NAACP appealed to the Supreme Court on October 1, 1951, and their case was combined with other cases from South Carolina, Virginia and Delaware, all challenging school segregation. The Supreme Court first heard the case on December 9, 1952, but failed to reach a decision. The Court heard the reargument from December 7-8, 1953. The case was not decided until May 17, 1954, when Chief Justice Earl Warren read the decision of the unanimous Court. It stated that "in the field of public education the doctrine of 'separate but equal' has no place. Separate educational facilities are inherently unequal. Therefore, we hold that the plaintiffs and others similarly situated for whom the actions have been brought are, by reason of the segregation complained of, deprived of the equal protection of the laws guaranteed by the Fourteenth Amendment."

While the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision did not abolish segregation in other public areas, and did not require desegregation of public schools by any specific time, it was a giant step towards complete desegregation of public schools.

At this time this goal has still not been achieved. In some areas, on the contrary, the schools have become de facto more segregated than ever because of social, political, economic and other factors.

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MOTION

MOLINA \_\_\_\_\_

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YAROSLAVSKY \_\_\_\_\_

ANTONOVICH \_\_\_\_\_

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Nevertheless, the principle of desegregation of public schools remains a goal that is probably more important now than ever before. In a society that is now more diverse, successful school desegregation should continue to be a beacon for public policy. Throughout the United States numerous events have been and are continuing to be held in observance of the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision.

I THEREFORE MOVE THAT THE BOARD OF SUPERVISORS DECLARE THE WEEK OF MAY 17 THROUGH MAY 22<sup>ND</sup> AS BROWN V. BOARD OF EDUCATION WEEK IN LOS ANGELES COUNTY, IN OBSERVATION OF THE 50<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY OF THIS HISTORIC DECISION.

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